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UNICEF AND THE RESTRUCTURING AND REVITALIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS IN THE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND RELATED FIELDS

SUMMARY

The present report has been prepared in response to General Assembly resolution 47/199 of 22 December 1992 on the operational activities of the United Nations development system. In that resolution, the Assembly called upon the governing bodies of the United Nations system to take action for the full implementation of the resolution and requested the executive heads of the funds and agencies to report to their governing bodies on measures taken for its implementation.

After a brief introduction, chapter I discusses previous activity by UNICEF and the Executive Board concerning reform of United Nations operational activities. Chapter II focuses on the provisions of resolution 47/199 that are relevant to UNICEF and the UNICEF response to them. Chapter III reports briefly on the General Assembly discussions on the reform of the United Nations in the economic and social fields.

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INTRODUCTION

1. During the past year, the General Assembly has had discussions on the reform of the United Nations system focusing on two "tracks": one track, a discussion of operational activities for development, focused particularly on field-level activities and culminated in resolution 47/199 of 22 December 1992; the second track, a discussion of reform of the United Nations in the economic and social fields and including issues of governance and finance (stimulated by the "Nordic Project"), is continuing.

2. The present report summarizes the issues related to the implementation of resolution 47/199.. Given the short period of time that has elapsed since its adoption, this report will only outline the issues raised in the resolution. The Executive Director will provide an update to the Executive Board at its 1993 regular session on how he proposes to respond to the resolution. This will require consultations and, in certain respects, agreement with UNICEF key partners. It is anticipated that many of the recommendations that the Executive Director will make, particularly those with financial implications, will require additional review by the Board at a subsequent session. In addition to the activities described in the present report, UNICEF will contribute to the report to be presented by the Secretary-General to the Economic and Social Council in July.

3. The present report will also review the issues of governance and finance under discussion by the General Assembly. Because those discussions are ongoing, specific recommendations cannot be made until the Assembly has concluded its work.

4. Other reports presented to the Executive Board, including the report of the Executive Director, regional reports and country programme recommendations, also provide information on UNICEF collaboration with partners such as the World Health Organization, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank. In particular, the report on emergency operations (E/ICEF/1993/11) describes the close collaboration of UNICEF in emergencies with the United Nations Department of Humanitarian Affairs, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the World Food Programme (WFP).

I. PREVIOUS REVIEWS BY THE UNICEF EXECUTIVE BOARD

5. The Executive Board has reviewed a number of issues related to the reform of the United Nations system at previous sessions. In 1989, the Executive Director presented a report entitled "UNICEF and the United Nations system: an agenda for inter-agency action" (E/ICEF/1989/L.8), and in 1990, a follow-up report on "UNICEF and the operational activities of the United Nations system: an update for 1990" (E/ICEF/1990/L.8). In decision 1989/14 (E/ICEF/1989/12), the Executive Board encouraged UNICEF to intensify collaboration with the United Nations system to fulfil the developmental needs of recipient countries. In decision 1990/21 (E/ICEF/1990/13), the Board requested the Executive Director to continue to arrange active UNICEF participation in the Consultative Committee on Substantive Questions (Operational Activities) (CCSQ/OPS) and the Joint

Consultative Group on Policy (JCGP) in order to promote the harmonization of procedures, the coincidence of programme cycles, the move to co-location of country offices and the effective working of the resident coordinator system. In 1992, the Executive Director presented to the Board an informal note containing 10 points for reform of the United Nations system. In response to decision 1992/11 (E/ICEF/1992/14), the Executive Director participated in the debates of the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly on these issues.

II. THE UNICEF RESPONSE TO GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 47/199

6. The following sections outline the major elements of resolution 47/199 that are relevant to UNICEF. In order to facilitate the deliberations of the Executive Board, they focus on areas directly relevant to UNICEF operations. The numbers in parentheses refer to the relevant paragraphs of the resolution.

A. The country strategy note

(Paragraphs 9, 39 (c) and 39 (g))

7. As discussed during the 1992 Executive Board session, UNICEF developed the idea of a country strategy note and proposed it to the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC), which ultimately accepted it unanimously. The General Assembly urged that the country strategy note be prepared by interested recipient Governments in cooperation with the United Nations system.

8. UNICEF is now working to implement this provision through several channels. JCGP is supporting the United Nations to draft instructions that will be sent to resident coordinators. UNICEF also intends to propose to ACC through CCSQ/OPS that there be an active system-wide effort. Finally, UNICEF has briefed all country representatives to give them guidance and encourage strong support.

B. Common premises

(Paragraph 42)

9. The General Assembly welcomed the decision of JCGP to set a target for increasing the number of common premises, while emphasizing that this should be achieved in ways that increase efficiency (e.g. administrative consolidation) and do not increase costs.

10. UNICEF has proposed, and JCGP has accepted, that a plan be developed for a significant increase in common premises. The JCGP Subgroup on Harmonization (currently chaired by UNICEF) has prepared an initial country-by-country review and illustrative costing which will be reviewed by JCGP. UNICEF will also encourage participation from agencies and bodies that do not belong to JCGP.

C. Harmonization of programme cycles

(Paragraph 10)

11. Members of JCGP (UNICEF, UNDP, the United Nations Population Fund, WFP and the International Fund for Agricultural Development) had begun earlier to harmonize their programme cycles and adapting them to Governments' national planning cycles. The General Assembly reaffirmed the need to continue this process.

12. The JCGP Subgroup on Harmonization has prepared a work plan for an initiative that will aim to ensure full harmonization of cycles in virtually all countries not facing emergency or exceptional circumstances (perhaps 80 per cent of all countries).

D. The programme approach

(Paragraphs 12-14)

13. The Secretary-General has been requested by the General Assembly to promote an early agreement on a common interpretation of the programme approach.

14. The JCGP Subgroup on Harmonization has held a workshop/seminar on this issue and is supporting a paper that will be prepared by the United Nations and presented to CCSQ/OPS.

E. Rules, formats and procedures

(Paragraphs 29, 32-34)

15. Inter-agency coordination mechanisms, particularly JCGP, have been requested to give priority to simplifying, harmonizing and increasing the transparency of their procedures. JCGP has been requested to agree upon a common manual focusing on those issues. Procedures should be output-oriented, with corresponding evaluation processes. The General Assembly emphasized that the shift to a programme approach requires that formats, rules, procedures and reports support national capacity-building, as well as the need for field-level accountability.

16. The Subgroup on Harmonization has developed a work plan for addressing this issue, and work has begun on a common manual.

F. The resident coordinator system

(Paragraphs 37-39)

17. Resolution 47/199 stresses that particular attention should be paid to selecting resident coordinators who have a competent background in development, as well as managerial and team-building skills. In addition, the pool of those eligible for resident representative/resident coordinator posts should be

widened and there should be increased transparency in the selection process. JCGP will review this matter in April at its high-level meeting.

18. In strengthening the resident coordinator system, the General Assembly has emphasized that the creation of an additional bureaucratic layer should be avoided and that the separate identities and separate representation of the funds and programmes at the country level should be appropriately ensured, along with a clear and improved division of labour.

19. UNICEF will seek to ensure that these provisions are an integral part of the work of ACC and JCGP, as they are important to maintaining clear lines of accountability.

20. The General Assembly requests that individual country representatives should consult with and take into account any views of the resident coordinator during major programming exercises and that the resident coordinator may propose amendments to major projects or programmes to relate them better to the country strategy note.

21. It is the policy of UNICEF to invite the resident coordinator to be involved in the key stages of the UNICEF country programming process, where he/she can offer his/her views and suggestions, which are given serious consideration. Consultations have already taken place with all UNICEF representatives so as to ensure the strengthening of this process, and this dimension will be included in guidelines to field offices that the Executive Director will issue on the implementation of resolution 47/199. This issue has also been included in a questionnaire that is being sent to all UNICEF field representatives to ascertain the current levels of involvement and cross-participation and to identify obstacles that need to be addressed. The country strategy note and the field-level committees will strengthen the degree and quality of involvement by the partners of UNICEF.

G. Training

(Paragraphs 43-46)

22. Common training efforts that promote a shift to the programme approach and use of innovative execution modalities are urged both for headquarters and especially the field. Efforts at the national level should include on-the-job training and should develop national trainers so as to establish a continuous training process. In addition to the programme approach and national execution, other issues should be included such as programme accountability, financial auditing, support costs, evaluation and monitoring. National institutional expertise should receive particular attention.

23. The Consultative Committee on Administrative Questions (Personnel) and the JCGP Subgroup on Personnel and Training will be examining this issue. UNICEF will hold bilateral discussions with the International Labour Organisation Training Centre in Turin, Italy, in March and April.

H. Decentralization

(Paragraphs 24-25, 27)

24. The General Assembly urges that the United Nations system further decentralize capacity and authority to the field level. Governing bodies of all United Nations organizations are strongly urged to expand to the maximum extent possible the level of authority for cancelling, modifying or adding activities within approved programmes and for shifting resources, within approved lines, of programme components (with the approval of national authorities).

25. UNICEF is often cited as the most decentralized of all United Nations organizations. UNICEF will continue to review its procedures to examine possibilities for improvement and, above all, intends to ensure that its experience is available on a system-wide basis to support the efforts of its partners. It is important that efforts to make the overall level of decentralization more uniform to support the current degree of UNICEF decentralization.

I. Procurement

(Paragraphs 27-28)

26. Organizations are urged to undertake the procurement of expertise and equipment at the country level, with due regard to international competitive bidding. Similarly, efforts should be made to procure from underutilized major donors, within the framework of international competitive bidding.

27. UNICEF currently has significant levels of decentralization for local procurement and special efforts for procurement in developing countries and major underutilized donors (while maintaining the principles of international competitive bidding).

J. Field-level committees

(Paragraphs 40-41)

28. In countries where justified by the scale of activities of the United Nations, resident coordinators are called upon to establish a field-level committee, comprising all United Nations system representatives, to serve as a coordinating mechanism in the countries concerned. The committees should undertake advisory functions, in consultation with the host Government, and provide guidance on sectoral strategies, proposed programmes and specific issues or problems requiring a coordinated response.

29. UNICEF will propose that the United Nations ensure that committees are established in all countries of appropriate size and that, above all, the progress of these committees be monitored through clear, simplified reporting (ideally done collectively) that is reviewed regularly by senior staff at headquarters (including through ACC). UNICEF also intends to use these committees to help strengthen the involvement of organizations with its country

programming process, in a manner similar to the current involvement of other organizations at key stages in the programming process. UNICEF also intends that this provision will create opportunities for involvement by UNICEF representatives in other organizations' programme and project preparations.

III. THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY REVIEW OF GOVERNANCE AND FINANCE

30. The General Assembly is currently reviewing the governance and finance of the United Nations organizations, including many issues raised by the "Nordic United Nations Project". In the area of governance, major issues include developing more effective system-wide governance (perhaps through more effective use of the Economic and Social Council, with an international development council "function") and proposals for smaller governing bodies of the individual organizations that would meet on a more regular basis. In the area of finance, the General Assembly is studying ways to ensure adequate financial support on a more predictable and stable basis and examining the question of burden-sharing.

31. UNICEF will follow closely the Assembly's deliberations on these matters and will report to the Executive Board any developments that may be relevant or require action on its part. The Executive Director believes that a successful outcome of these deliberations will be important to future UNICEF efforts.